



**SAN JUAN COUNTY,  
WASHINGTON**

# **2023 YEAR-IN-REVIEW**

**PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY  
SAN JUAN COUNTY MANAGER'S OFFICE**

# INTRODUCTION

PG 1

## A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY MANAGER



Welcome. It is my pleasure to introduce the 2023 Year-in-Review, detailing San Juan County accomplishments as well as the services provided to our Island community. The success of the past 12 months was made possible by and through the diligent work of the employees, elected officials, and those who gave generously of their time to serve on any number of boards and commissions.

Amongst the highlights, the following are several key changes that occurred in 2023.

To begin the year, new councilmember, Jane Fuller – District 3, was seated, and the County rescinded its COVID state of emergency resolution following the State. Because the impacts of the pandemic still linger, Council appropriated over \$635,000 of federal ARPA funds to support a range of services provided by the Resource Centers, daycares, and others.

To magnify its voice and strengthen advocacy efforts, the County took the bold step of joining a multi-county consortium (SWISS) to partner on common issues such as housing, health, transportation, and ferries. And, for the first time, a lobbyist will represent the County's interest when the state legislative session begins.

The County completed ground-breaking scientific work on a Sea Level Rise Risk Assessment Study that provides the science needed to assess future impacts to shoreline ecology, public infrastructure, and private property. Sea level rise, along with climate change science and information, will be included in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan update and used in capital project decision making.



### Celebrating 150 Years of Public Service

On October 31, 2023, **San Juan County turned 150 years old.**

Established as its own local government on October 31, 1873 on the heels of the Pig War, San Juan County celebrated its rich and storied past with a proclamation, pop-up events on Orcas, Lopez, and San Jaun Islands, and a digital community photo album.

Thanks to the vision of the voters, the HomeFund provided \$2 million for affordable housing projects. The County passed a housing sales tax and selected a private partner to build a public/private affordable housing development in Friday Harbor.

Exasperated by difficulty recruiting and maintaining staff, the County boldly adopted a 32-hour work week – the first County to do so in the state. The change yielded a notable increase in applications and successful recruits.

I am proud of the work, successes, and organizational changes you will read in the Review. The progress and lessons learned in 2023 will serve the County and community well as we begin 2024.

– Mike Thomas, County Manager



# 2023 TIMELINE



## JANUARY

Councilmember Cindy Wolf assumed the role of Council Chair for 2023.

Jane Fuller joined the County Council to represent District 3.

## MARCH

HCS celebrated the launch of the new 'Luci B Community Wellness Van.'

## MAY

Council held meeting on Shaw Island.

## JULY

The County kicked off the plastic film recycling program on San Juan Island.

## SEPTEMBER

164 volunteers participated in the County's 'Great Islands Clean-up' and removed over 1,800lbs of litter from 50 miles of island roads and beaches.

## NOVEMBER

The San Juan County Sheriff's Office successfully completed a rigorous accreditation program.

County and Town officials sent an open letter to state officials regarding impacts of poor ferry service.

## FEBRUARY

The Conservation Land Bank hosted an open house meeting to provide input on three Lopez Preserves: Spencer Spit, Richardson Marsh, and Lopez Hill.

## APRIL

The Sheriff's Office introduced a new drone program to assist with search and rescue missions. Council voted to accept the San Juan Community Home Trust as the chosen applicant for the Argyle Lots affordable housing project.

## JUNE

County celebrated the completion of the Holliwalk Neighborhood -a project that received over \$1.5 million of County funding.

## AUGUST

The four-day County Fair, themed 'Dancing with the Steers' welcomed over 14,000 attendees.

The County announced the adoption of a 32-hour work week.

## OCTOBER

County Council adopted a new 1/10th of 1% sales tax for affordable housing and related services.

County and WSF completed the Orcas Ferry Terminal updates, paving the way for greater accessibility.

San Juan County celebrated its 150th anniversary as an organization!

## DECEMBER

Conservation Land Bank engaged the community in strategic planning with an online survey. San Juan County adopted the 2024/25 budget.



# COUNTY-WIDE NEWS & INITIATIVES

PG 3

## SAN JUAN COUNTY LAUNCHED A NUMBER OF NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS, INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY, AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

The County unveiled **Civic Clerk** - a new software to streamline meetings and manage agendas. The IT department also transitioned the County's website from [sanjuanco.com](http://sanjuanco.com) to [sanjuancountywa.gov](http://sanjuancountywa.gov) to increase cyber security.

The County was proud to invest in the next generation of workers by launching its first **internship program** in 2023. Six interns joined five different County departments to gain on-the-job experience, professional development opportunities, and earn a paycheck. Interns worked on recycling projects, supported the County's Financial Services, created educational resources for the public, and much more.

### Featured Projects

The screenshot displays the Engage San Juan County platform interface. It features a grid of project cards. The 'Featured Projects' section includes 'Take the Land Bank's Survey', '150th Anniversary of San Juan County', 'Land Bank Strategic Plan', and '32-Hour Work Week Initiative'. The 'Environmental Stewardship Projects' section includes 'San Juan Islands Destination Management Plan' and 'Climate Action'. Each card includes a title, a brief description, a date, and a 'View Project' button.

### ENGAGE PLATFORM

San Juan County launched a new platform called 'Engage San Juan County' in January of 2023.



**65,111**  
SITE VISITS



**1,494**  
CONTRIBUTIONS



**607**  
REGISTRATIONS

The platform provides opportunities for the public to participate in large-scale projects. Users of the platform can sign-up for news alerts, submit questions and feedback, and follow a project through its stages of completion.

The platform now hosts 12 projects.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The County named Norm Gollub as Interim Director of the Department of Community Development (DCD) who served the department from June to December. During the summer, Gollub and County officials led a series of community meetings where public feedback informed the following actions to improve DCD services:

- **Building Permit Review:** The County hired Townzen & Associates to assist with review of building plans. This provided additional review capacity for staff and helped shorten review times.
- **Environmental Review:** The County hired Canyon Environmental to review critical area reports which reduced the months-long land use permit review times.
- **SmartGov:** Staff is continuing to expand the SmartGov system to include all permits. This means users will have one portal through which they can access and track all their applications and permits.
- **Department Website:** Staff is actively reorganizing the DCD website to improve the user experience and to streamline the information gathering and application processes.

The County continues to work with a human resource consult agency to recruit a new director.



# COUNCIL CORNER

## NOTABLE ORDINANCES & RESOLUTIONS

- Council adopted an ordinance approving a 32-hour work week for County employees.
- County Council committed **\$2 million** to **affordable housing** and passed a 1/10th of 1% sales tax to benefit affordable housing projects.
- Council adopted the **Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program** which allows for strategic infrastructure planning.
- County Council adopted the **2024/25 Biennial Budget** which focuses on six major initiatives:
  - Partnering for change
  - Community enrichment
  - Access for all
  - Planning for a changing world
  - Stewarding island resources
  - Sustaining a resilient workforce
- The County joined a multi-county consortium (**SWISS**) and partnered with federal and state elected representatives to advocate for causes including:
  - *long term, systematic changes to the Washington State Ferry system*
  - *housing affordability*
  - *access to healthcare*
- Council oversaw the allocation of **federal ARPA funds** (over \$635,000) to support community services including daycare and resources centers.



“

### A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

*2023 was a year of adjusting to post-COVID reality. County staff and elected officials met challenges with innovative thinking and teamwork. We gathered information, tried new ideas, and met frustrations with a willingness to listen and learn - even if it meant putting projects on hold while we drilled down on solutions. Thank you to the many volunteers who gave their time and expertise to serve on advisory bodies. You bring a collective wisdom to our decision-making process. Thank you to County staff, elected officials, and my seatmates for their commitment to the well-being of our County. It has been an honor to serve alongside you as Chair of County Council.*

-Cindy Wolf

”



Jan.-March, Council and other elected officials, hosted a series of **“Meet Your Elected Officials” events**. These events offered the public opportunities to meet newly elected and re-elected officials, ask questions, and learn about priorities for 2023.



IN 2023, SAN JUAN COUNTY MADE HEADLINES AS ONE OF THE FIRST COUNTIES TO ADOPT A 32-HOUR WORK WEEK. THE NEWS EARNED 360+ MEDIA MENTIONS, OVER A DOZEN INTERVIEWS, AND RENEWED INTEREST IN THE COUNTY AS AN EMPLOYER.

43

FULL-TIME  
POSITIONS  
HIRED

84%

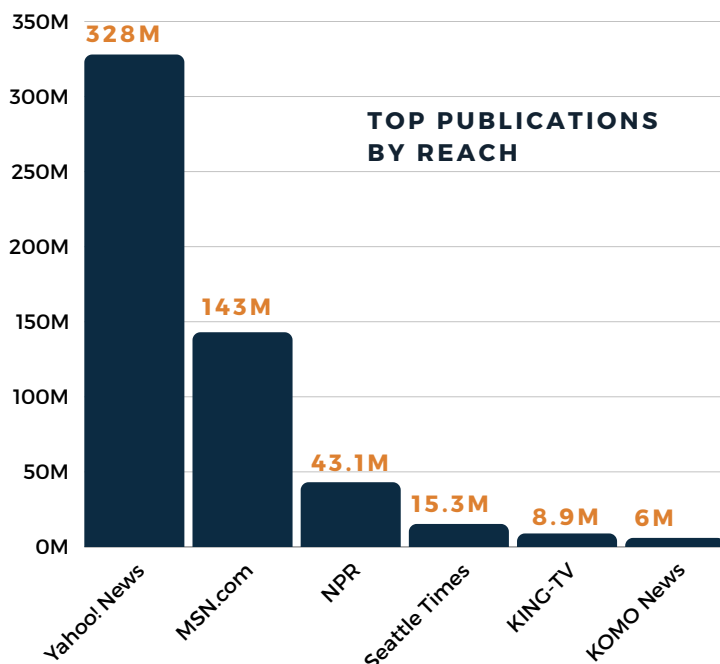
RETENTION  
RATE

29

SEASONAL  
POSITIONS  
HIRED

635M

TOTAL POTENTIAL EDITORIAL REACH



This dramatic measure is supporting the County in maintaining **fiscal health**, improving employee **recruitment and retention**, and prioritizing the **well-being** of islanders.

#### Fiscal Health

To stay within its current taxing authority, the County is holding wages relatively constant by reducing the work week by eight hours. This gave employees an increase in hourly wages while not significantly impacting the budget.

#### Recruitment & Retention

The County had been operating with a chronic 10-15% job vacancy rate across key departments, making it difficult to meet deadlines, avoid employee burnout, and retain institutional knowledge. Since adopting the 32-hour work week, the County has seen a 100-150% increase in employment applications across almost all departments with applicants citing the 32-hour work week as a main reason for their interest in County work.

#### Employee Wellness

San Juan County knows its strength lies in the public servants who run its departments and programs. By prioritizing the people who keep the County running and promoting employee wellness with a 32-hour work week, San Juan County is setting the standard for quality work-life balance in the islands.



# FINANCIAL SERVICES

THE TREASURER'S, ASSESSOR'S, AND AUDITOR'S OFFICES ADDED NEW STAFF AND FINANCIAL SOFTWARE PROGRAMS.

The Auditor's Office oversaw **local elections** and led efforts to adopt the **2024/25 biennial budget**.

The Assessor's Office helped the public navigate Substitute House Bill 1355 which enacted **new income limits that affect taxes** for senior citizens and people with disabilities.

The Treasurer's Office unveiled a new **Auto-Pay Tax Enrollment Program**, accessible via their website. This program allows taxpayers to automatically pay their taxes. The program includes the payment of real and personal property taxes.

# LEGAL SERVICES

The **Prosecuting Attorney's Office** successfully defended appeals to the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan, provided training to County employees and prosecutors throughout the state, and resolved a large number of criminal cases.

The **Public Defender** worked collaboratively with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office to settle criminal cases when appropriate and defended people's constitutional rights at trial when necessary. Several of our poorest community members had thousands of dollars in Legal Financial Obligations reduced or forgiven by the Courts with the Public Defender's assistance.

CLERK'S CONFERENCE

PG 6



## THE COURTS

The Courts implemented a **new online portal to communicate with potential jurors** who can follow a link to fill out the questionnaire and sign up for email or text alerts. The Courts also welcomed a **courthouse security officer** who will provide security at hearings and weapons screening as requested.

The Clerk's Office hosted the **117th WA State Association of County Clerks Summer Conference** in Friday Harbor. 36 of the 39 counties were represented at the week-long educational conference.

Superior Court launched **Family Treatment Court**, a therapeutic court for families in dependency proceedings that provides case management and intensive, individually tailored services. Superior Court Services concentrated on opportunities to **increase meaningful access to justice** with special attention to expanded restorative justice practices, facilitating community healing. The office is honored to serve youth and families in the spirit of collaboration, teamwork, and equity.



6TH GRADERS TOURING THE HAUNTED COURTHOUSE

# HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES

PG 7

IN 2023, SAN JUAN COUNTY'S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES LAUNCHED A SERIES OF NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES, INCLUDING:

- The Communicable Disease program launched a free **HIV testing program**.
- The Maternal Child Health program launched the **'Growing Families' program** - a universally offered home-visiting service.
- The Reproductive Health program started convening the San Juans **Reproductive Health Coalition** with community partners, working to improve access to reproductive health services across the county.
- A new **oral health program** provided "Smile Checks" and screened 748 students, placed 457 sealants, and hosted four days of treatments on three islands.
- ECEAP Health Coordinator & Childcare Nurse Consultants completed **vision and hearing screenings** on over 40 children.



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING FAST FACTS:

- The **Home Fund** committed nearly **\$2 million** to support three affordable housing projects in 2023.
- HCS, the Housing Advisory Committee, and the County Council worked together to award the San Juan Community Home Trust the **Argyle Lots project**.
- The department also worked with County Council to adopt a **1/10th of 1% sales tax** for affordable housing.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT

## BY THE NUMBERS

**2,109**

TOTAL IMMUNIZATIONS  
ADMINISTERED

**36,000**

MEALS PROVIDED VIA  
SENIOR SERVICES  
PROGRAMS

**31,800**

COPIES OF HCS  
NEWSLETTER  
DISTRIBUTED

**165**

FAMILY CAREGIVER  
SESSIONS

## LUCI B COMMUNITY WELLNESS VAN

The department purchased the Luci B Community Wellness Van this year that allows HCS to take public health services including immunization clinics, wellness and screening events, public health emergency response efforts, and much more to community members where they live, work, and play.







# AT WORK WITH PUBLIC WORKS

THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION.

14

MILES OF RE-SURFACED ROADS

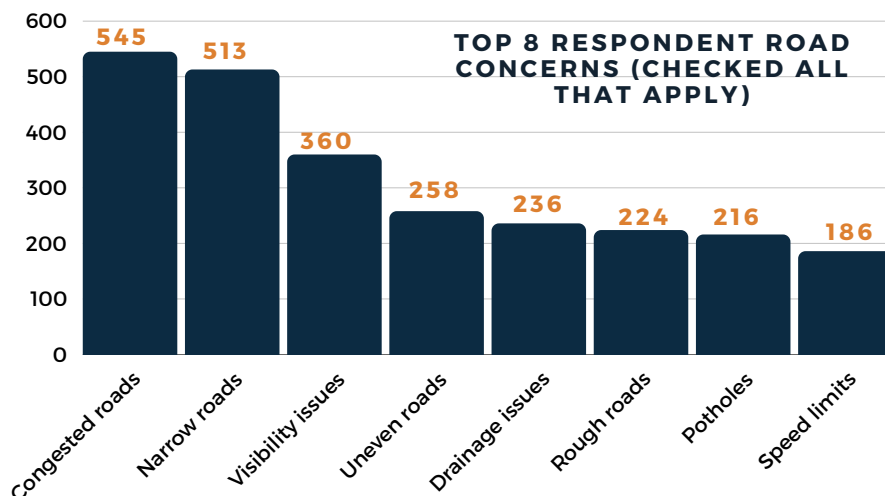
15

NEW HIRES IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

1,002

RESPONSES TO PW SURVEY

San Juan County's Public Works Department published a community survey that posed the question, "**How should your roads work for you?**" The results of the 26-question survey highlighted the public's desire for increased safety in County infrastructure.



## On the Move

In 2023, the department completed and opened the new **consolidated operations center** at Beaverton Valley on San Juan Island. This new, 18,268 sq ft building provides office space for five departments, shop space for the fleet program, and material storage space for gravel, sand, salt, and other necessary road maintenance materials.

The department also secured a new building along Norman Road on Lopez Island, enabling the relocation of Public Works operations from Fisherman Bay Road.

## Paving the Way for Accessibility

The department completed a third phase of improvements at the **Orcas Island Ferry Terminal Landing** in partnership with Washington State Ferries and the Port of Friday Harbor. The project added ADA-compliant parking spaces, updated stormwater infrastructure, provided additional sidewalks and pavement markings, and added a new retaining wall, among other key features that **increase public safety and access to amenities**.

# LAND BANK

THIS YEAR, THE CONSERVATION LAND BANK HOSTED OVER 65 EVENTS, OPENED A NEW PUBLIC PRESERVE ON LOPEZ ISLAND, AND RESTORED 50 ACRES OF FORESTLAND.

The department also celebrated the return of Coho salmon and the first ever sighting of Chinook fry at Coho Preserve on Orcas Island. This year also enjoyed a first-time discovery of an endangered Island Marble Butterfly caterpillar in a San Juan Island preserve habitat enclosure.

## LAND BANK BY THE NUMBERS

46

CONSERVATION  
EASEMENTS MONITORED

12

NEW PARKING  
SPACES AT MOUNT  
GRANT PRESERVE

20

NEW CULVERTS AT  
TURTLEBACK MOUNTAIN  
PRESERVE

30

POUNDS OF  
NATIVE SEED  
PRODUCED BY  
SALISH SEEDS  
PROJECT

## LAND BANK LOOKS AHEAD

This year, the Land Bank invited the community to participate in shaping its emerging **Strategic Plan** by conducting nearly 60 interviews with community members and distributing an **online survey** to collect input from residents, businesses, local elected officials, and staff.

# PARKS, RECREATION, & FAIR

THIS YEAR, THE PARKS, RECREATION, AND FAIR DEPARTMENT IMPROVED BEACH ACCESS POINTS AT TWO PARKS, WELCOMED OVER 14,000 PEOPLE TO THE FAIR, AND PROUDLY DISPLAYED 3,516 EXHIBITS FROM 1,335 EXHIBITORS.

## PARKS & FAIR BY THE NUMBERS



\$1.5M

IN DEPT. MAINTENANCE  
& IMPROVEMENTS

3

NEW/ UPGRADED  
RESTROOM FACILITIES  
AT COUNTY PARKS



100s

OF FEET OF NEW  
FENCE TO DELINEATE  
PARK FEATURES

The department also partnered with the San Juan Island Historical Museum to **restore the nearly 100-year-old pioneer cabin** at the Fairgrounds, renovated the **Marie Boe Building** at the Fairgrounds, added a quarter mile **'Overlook' trail** at Odlin County Park on Lopez Island, and rebuilt hiker/biker food lockers.



# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

## BY THE NUMBERS

**2,000+**

MARINE BUOYS  
EVALUATED

**20**

DERELICT VESSELS  
ADDRESSED

**6,445**

POUNDS OF LITTER  
COLLECTED DURING THE  
GREAT ISLANDS CLEAN UP

**4,820**

POUNDS OF ORGANIC  
WASTE COMPOSTED  
FROM THE FAIR

**900+**

COMMENTS RE: THE  
DRAFT DESTINATION  
MANAGEMENT PLAN

THE DEPARTMENT SUSTAINS A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY BY WORKING IN CLEAN WATER, SOLID WASTE, MARINE & CULTURAL RESOURCES, AND CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY.

## PLANS & STUDIES

The department led the County in completing a greenhouse gas inventory for the community and County operations. The **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory Report** was published in September.

The department also led efforts to draft the preliminary **Destination Management Plan** and respond to public feedback.



## NEW PILOT PROJECT

The department launched a **plastic film recycling pilot project** that allows residents to recycle clean and dry plastic bags, plastic storage bags such as Ziploc® brand bags, and other flexible plastic film by dropping off collected material in a "Plastic Film Only" bin.

## CREOSOTE PILING REMOVAL AT JACKSON BEACH

This year, the department led the removal of 132 creosote pilings from San Juan Island's Jackson Beach. The derelict pier had been crumbling for decades and the creosote piles were leaching toxins into the marine environment. This project **improved habitat** for fish, seabirds, and marine mammals as well as **improved the shoreline for the community**.



HABITAT PLANTING



PILING REMOVAL AT JACKSON BEACH

# SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

WHETHER RESPONDING TO NATURAL DISASTERS OR ANSWERING 911 CALLS, SAN JUAN COUNTY HAS A TALENTED TEAM OF FIRST RESPONDERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE SPECIALISTS.

## SHERIFF'S OFFICE BY THE NUMBERS



**10,000+**  
CALLS FOR  
SERVICE TO THE  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE



**98**  
ANONYMOUS  
TIPS SUBMITTED  
VIA TIP-411



**2**  
NEW DRONES  
ADDED TO THE  
OFFICE'S SEARCH  
& RESCUE TOOLS

This year, the San Juan County Sheriff's Office successfully completed a rigorous **accreditation program** that certifies it is operating under best practices and standards for law enforcement.

The program is administered by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) and involves an eight-phase process over several months.



The Sheriff's Office also upgraded their fleet with a **new vessel** in order to better serve the communities on outer islands.

In 2023, the Office also hired a lateral corrections officer for a hybrid **corrections/courthouse security position**.



## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

This year, Emergency Management launched the **Next Generation 911 Emergency Response System (NG911)** that improves coverage and capabilities for first responders and the public. The department also hosted inter-agency trainings that unite first responders, communicators, and community leaders in preparation for emergency response.

San Juan County also invested in upgrades to the County's Emergency Operations Center at the Fairgrounds.

## FIRE MARSHAL

San Juan County Fire Marshal's Office implemented a **new fire inspection software system** in 2023. The County's Fire Marshal completed Washington State Fire Marshal's Office Fire Investigator credentialing process. The Burn Permit program is under review with all Fire Districts and San Juan County.



THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO MADE 2023 A WONDERFUL YEAR!

